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SPECIAL ISSUE

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The next gen

Jeremy Dickson
Features & Special Projects Editor

The kids entertainment industry hasn't always been the most diverse when it comes to representation on screen and behind the scenes. The good news is that a lot more work is being done to support marginalized creators trying to break in and move up, which will improve equitability and authenticity over time.

Netflix launched its Children's Content Lab in 2022 with American disability advocacy group RespectAbility. This program provides training and networking opportunities to disabled TV writers, animators and creative executives who are pursuing careers in preschool and children's television.

This February, Canada's public broadcaster CBC added its first dedicated stream for kids content to AccessCBC—a project that supports deaf and disabled creators in Canada. And in 2020, ABC Australia and Screen Australia launched The Kaleidoscope Project, a funding program to help culturally and linguistically diverse Aussie creatives make short films for kids.

For its part, Kidscreen has bolstered the push for change by introducing its Diverse Voices mentoring program in 2021. If you're not familiar with this initiative, Diverse Voices is designed to support under-represented talent trying to break in and move up in the kids industry.

Last fall, with the help of several advocacy groups, Kidscreen connected 25 mentees with industry mentors to work on career-planning, building relationships through networking, and fine-tuning their creative concepts.

Each mentee was also invited to attend Kidscreen Summit, where they could choose to participate in private speed pitching meetings to show their projects to potential investors and leverage other networking opportunities with industry leaders.

Kidscreen extends a heartfelt thank you to our 2023 mentors: Cort Lane (Hasbro Entertainment's VP of original content and entertainment), Kathy Le Backes (Walt Disney Studios' director of content advisement—representation, inclusion strategies & engagement), Dr. Mariana Diaz-Wionczek (children's media consultant and executive producer), Kris Wimberly (Studio Smokescreen co-founder and head of creative) and Conrad Montgomery (children's media consultant).

We would also like to thank Black N' Animated, GLAAD, LatinX in Animation and RespectAbility for selecting this year's mentees. Check out page 11 to learn more about these amazing nonprofit organizations.

And lastly, we are grateful to all of the super-talented mentees who have come through the program over the last three years. We look forward to following your journeys and celebrating your successes in the industry.

kidscreen's Diverse Voices
APRIL 2024 SPECIAL ISSUE

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Diverse Voices

A unique opportunity for under-represented talent trying to break in and move up in the kids entertainment industry, Kidscreen's Diverse Voices mentoring program is designed to connect up-and-comers with experienced executives who can help them build meaningful relationships through networking.

Participants were selected by our partner organizations and grouped with industry mentors based on the area of work they're interested in pursuing. Each small group of mentees had video calls with their mentor to discuss career goals; plan, identify and develop leads for network-building; and review their current projects. The mentees were also invited to attend Kidscreen Summit 2024 in San Diego, where they had several private speed pitching meetings.

The Diverse Voices program is supported by these US partner organizations...

Black N' Animated

An LA-based organization, Black N' Animated is committed to supporting the empowerment and growth of Black students and professionals working in the animation industry, by providing networking and career development opportunities.

glaad

GLAAD is a non-profit organization focused on LGBTQ advocacy and cultural change. It works to ensure accurate, fair and inclusive representation, and creates national and local programs that accelerate acceptance for LGBTQ people.

LXiA LATINX IN ANIMATION Empowering Diversity in Animation from Page to Post

A signature program of the Latino Film Institute, LatinX in Animation is dedicated to uniting LatinX groups within the animation, VFX and gaming industries, and providing resources for developing the careers of these creatives and decision-makers.

respect ability FIGHTING STIGMAS. ADVANCING OPPORTUNITIES.

RespectAbility is an advocacy group that works to create systemic change in how society views and values people with disabilities, advancing policies and practices that empower people with disabilities to have a better future.

Riley Wilson

New York, NY

rwilson@littleappleuniverse.com

CURRENTLY: Founder, director and writer, Little Apple Universe

BACKGROUND: A Howard University School of Business graduate, Riley was drawn to the kids entertainment industry by his love for telling empowering stories about diverse cultures and Afrofuturism.

INDUSTRY EXPERIENCE: He created a live-action, sci-fi series called *Little Apple*, which has since expanded into comic books and a streaming platform for schools. It centers around the supernatural adventures of a nine-year-old Black girl who is claircognizant.

Riley is also the author of *My ID*, and the writer/director behind short films *Orange Bright* and *Blue Monday*.

AWARDS AND RECOGNITION: In 2019, *Little Apple* won a Best Web Series award at the American Black Film Festival.

GOALS: Riley is looking for production partners for a new project that will further expand the Little Apple brand. He also wants to double the number of schools that subscribe to Little Apple.

FAVORITE MEDIUM: He loves live-action projects the most because he can direct and collaborate with actors to create immersive and thoughtful characters in real time.

INSPIRATIONS: American writer Shel Silverstein, for his ability to showcase how fun, accessible and playful writing can be. Riley points to Silverstein's *A Light In The Attic* as a book that changed his life in grade school.

UNIQUE HOBBY: Collecting a wide range of insects, an interest he developed as a child with his mom, who is a scientist and educator.

Deirdre Morales

Cambridge, MA

deirdre@thelooplab.org

BACKGROUND: Deirdre is a writer and producer with a passion for visual storytelling. She received her MFA in film production from Florida State University, and interned in children's media early in her career. She later returned to the industry after becoming a parent and being diagnosed with multiple cognitive disabilities.

In addition to creating kids TV content, she also runs a production studio that's part of a nonprofit called The Loop Lab, which aims to bring equity into the entertainment space by supporting individuals from prioritized communities with education and employment opportunities.

COOL ACCOMPLISHMENT: She's a proud alum of RespectAbility's Children's Content Lab, which was sponsored by Netflix and received support from 9 Story Media Group and Sony Pictures Television—Kids.

GOALS: To produce her preschool series, *N is for Neurodiversity,* and help make this industry accessible to everyone.

INSPIRATIONS: Joan Ganz Cooney and all of the early creatives behind *Sesame Street*. "My focus is on using entertainment to bridge gaps for neurodivergent children who may not be receiving the support they need at school and/or at home," she says.

WOULD LOVE TO WORK FOR: Fred Rogers Productions, Lopii Productions

NEW SKILL: She plays piano and also recently taught herself how to play the ukulele.

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DIVERSE VOICES PROGRAM 2024 MENTEES

Jordan Brown

Atlanta, GA

linkedin.com/in/jordan-brown-page

"I have an unshakable urge to share authentic and inclusive stories."

CURRENTLY: Social media coordinator, Black N' Animated

BACKGROUND: Jordan is a digital content creator who specializes in crafting visual stories and vlogs on her social channels. She earned a BA in political science at Georgia Gwinnett College in 2022, and is currently pursuing her MA in professional writing at Kennesaw State University.

INDUSTRY EXPERIENCE: Jordan led social media campaigns, pitched ideas and produced new content while working as a social media intern for CNN Underscored in 2022.

INSPIRATIONS: She was drawn to working in the kids entertainment business by her younger siblings, who have always influenced her scripts. Jordan also admires American actress and writer Issa Rae, whose social media content influenced her to pursue this career path.

CREATIVE ACHIEVEMENTS: Last year, Jordan's videos secured her a spot in the #BlackTikTok Creator Community program, which offered networking and training sessions to help her better understand the kids media business, including how to sell creative content to buyers and reach audiences outside her "niche."

GOALS: To become a successful screenwriter, creating passionate and authentic stories her audience can relate to. For her next step, Jordan is looking to work as a writer's or production assistant in order to learn how to develop and deliver a TV script.

She is also interested in working as a social media specialist to sharpen her storytelling skills and deepen her knowledge of the entertainment business.

Sabrina Vega

Miami, FL

sabrinavega.com

sabrinavegart@gmail.com

CURRENTLY: Production assistant, Adult Swim

BACKGROUND: Growing up in an Hispanic household meant that Sabrina was raised with a talent and appreciation for the art of storytelling. "Loud voices and overlapping conversations would quickly hush for a carefully crafted story in my home, ranging from telenovela 'chisme' (gossip) to absurd anecdotes," she recalls.

She earned a BFA in character animation and emerging media from the University of Central Florida, where she was also the 2D animation lead/story artist on a short called *Forget Me Not*, which won several awards on the festival circuit.

INSPIRATIONS: Michelle Lam, who has worked on two kid-friendly graphic novels and numerous animated series. "In high school, I watched her CalArts-accepted sketchbook video, and absolutely loved her voice and her shape language in storytelling."

FAVORITE MEDIUM: There's no doubt that 2D animation rules Sabrina's heart. There's something charming about it that allows for more experimentation, she explains. But projects that skillfully blend 2D and CG animation have also caught her artistic eye.

GOALS: Sabrina is eager to be part of a story room on an animated production, either in TV or film. Along with her proven ability as an artist and storyboarder, she is also looking to bring an authentic perspective to her work. "Latine experiences come in all shapes and sizes, and it's rare to see my mix—a Guatemalan-Cuban first-generation woman—in those rooms."

UNIQUE HOBBY: Sabrina can often be found in the arcade playing *Pump It Up*, and she's a self-proclaimed Pokémon nerd who creates fan art based on the franchise.

Cindy Proaño

Anaheim, CA

instagram.com/cinsarts

BACKGROUND: Cindy is a first-generation Ecuadorian/Salvadoran story artist and character designer with a BFA in entertainment art/animation from California State University (Fullerton). After finishing school, she created and developed professional storyboards with original characters and plot/concept designs as a story artist mentee in Netflix's Animation Foundations Program. She's currently storyboarding on an independent 2D-animated short film called *Pelea*.

FAVORITE MEDIUM: 2D animation

INSPIRATIONS: Storyboard artists Miguel Baltazar (*Wish*), Dean Kelly (*Coco*) and Ian Abando (*My Dad the Bounty Hunter*), to name a few.

NEW SKILL: Cindy has recently taken a 3D modeling class for Blender in order to refamiliarize herself with the medium and learn the Blender program.

PASSIONS: Cindy says the art of storytelling has always been a big part of her life, "from my abuelita telling me stories about her childhood, to the stories I'd see unfold on screen. Being able to create, communicate and connect through this medium is the best experience."

UNIQUE HOBBY: Playing the Charango, an Andean string instrument she received as a gift from her family in Ecuador. "It has definitely been a challenge, but a very rewarding time overall."

GOALS: To become a storyboard artist and eventually an episodic director or showrunner leading a team. "I definitely enjoy working with people, and getting the chance to be entrenched in a collaborative environment is what I love."

Nikiiyah Gest

Anaheim, CA

mahoganeeartt@gmail.com

CURRENTLY: Story/editorial coordinator, Sony Pictures Animation

BACKGROUND: After working in education for two years, Nikiiyah pivoted in 2020 to follow her passion for animation, multidisciplinary art and screenwriting. She wrote for FutureGen Comics, launched Mahoganee Art, landed a remote gig with AfroAnimation Summit and joined nonprofit orgs Women in Animation and Black N' Animated while still living in Cleveland, but then moved to LA in 2022.

BIG BREAK: Nikiiyah accepted a recruiting trainee role at Sony Pictures Animation in June 2022, and was quickly promoted to recruiting coordinator and then story/editorial coordinator. "My time at Sony has been a game-changer in many ways. I've built tons of connections, found mentors and made lasting friendships."

COOL ACCOMPLISHMENT: Nikiiyah's company, Mahoganee Art, features her custom artwork and children's book illustrations. "I aim to create pieces that uplift and portray the Black community in a positive light."

GOALS: Short term, she plans to enroll in more writing classes and complete a script. Her long-term goals include becoming a professional screenwriter and running a successful art business.

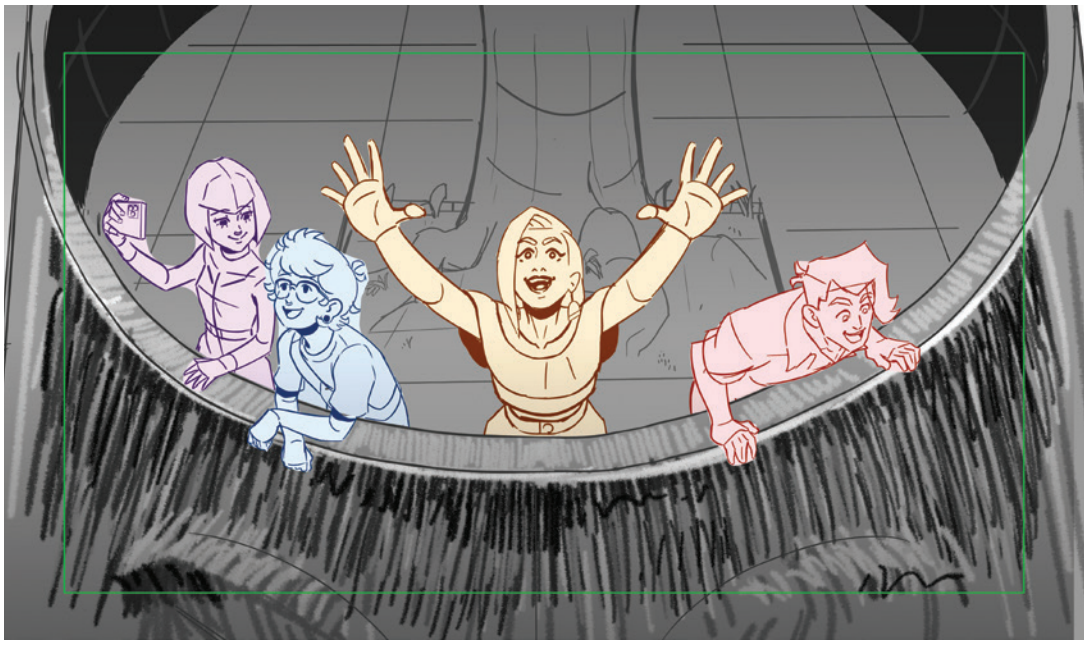
> "I aim to create pieces that uplift and portray the Black community in a positive light."

PASSIONS: Uplifting Black voices through traditional and digital art, entertainment and children's books.

INSPIRATIONS: American screenwriter and television producer Mara Brock Akil (*The Game*). "Her ability to craft relatable content is truly remarkable, and I admire how many of her shows have enjoyed long-running seasons."

UNIQUE HOBBY: She started riding horses last year. "I'm on my seventh ride!"

THOUGHTS ON DIVERSE VOICES: "Black N' Animated made it possible for me to participate, and so far it's been amazing. I truly appreciate the authenticity my mentor, Kris Wimberly, brings to the industry. We've discussed important topics like mental health and finding balance between work and personal life, which is incredibly helpful."



Ernesto Alonso

Oakland, CA

storybyernesto.com

BACKGROUND: Ernesto is a freelance animator and storyboard artist who specializes in action, fantasy and drama. He was inspired at a young age to work in the entertainment industry because he wanted to create new cartoons and TV shows that would excite him and encourage other kids to pick up the pencil. He views working on animation as similar to learning martial arts—in both pursuits, he never stops looking for new ways to refine and perfect his craft.

EDUCATION: Ernesto graduated from San Jose State University in 2017 with a BA in art, and completed courses in storyboarding for television and character design for animation at the Concept Design Academy.

FAVOURITE MEDIUM: Traditional and digital 2D animation. "It's always a fun challenge," he says.

INSPIRATIONS: The work of creators Genndy Tartakovsky (*Samurai Jack*) and Akira Toriyama (*Dragon Ball*) prompted Ernesto to start drawing as a kid. He later pivoted to focus on animation, motivated by several of his teachers and American animator LeSean Thomas, who helped mold him into the artist he is today.

PASSIONS: When he's not picking up new art books and supplies for his studio, Ernesto is passionate about Mexican culture, linguistics and cool sneakers.

GOALS: Ernesto's long-term plan is to become independent and produce original animation. In the meantime, he's looking to build up his reputation in the industry and work on projects that inspire others.

Tyler Hoog

Los Angeles, CA

tjhoog17@gmail.com

BACKGROUND: A writer and comedian at heart, Tyler's passion for stories is deeply intertwined with his experience in recovery. "When I was 17 years old, I was paralyzed from the neck down in a car accident, and it was movies and television that pulled me out of my funk during those long nights in the hospital."

Aside from participating in numerous fellowships, Tyler has also consistently worked behind the scenes as a consultant on projects relating to wheelchairs, mobility, disabilities, PTSD and anxiety for media giants like Netflix and Disney. He also has an impressive academic resumé, with an MFA in screenwriting (University of Southern California) and a BFA in communication (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill).

Now he's looking to apply his writing talent in the children's media biz. "Other than the fact that I'm a giant child myself, I believe kids entertainment is often the most well-balanced entertainment, as well as the perfect medium to handle nuanced topics."

GOALS: Tyler is currently focused on joining a writers room of a show and expanding his consulting network. Eventually, he hopes to establish his own banner to develop and produce projects.

INSPIRATIONS: It's a long list that includes Bill Lawrence, Judd Apatow, Phil Miller and Christopher Lord. "I write brash and irreverent humor with underlying heart. I think when you break down my style, you can certainly see my influences."

DREAM WORKPLACE: Cartoon Network. "[They have] done everything from amazing 11-minute comedies that transcend age, to sprawling adventure series with deep and rich character evolution," Tyler says, referencing *Young Justice* and *Regular Show*.

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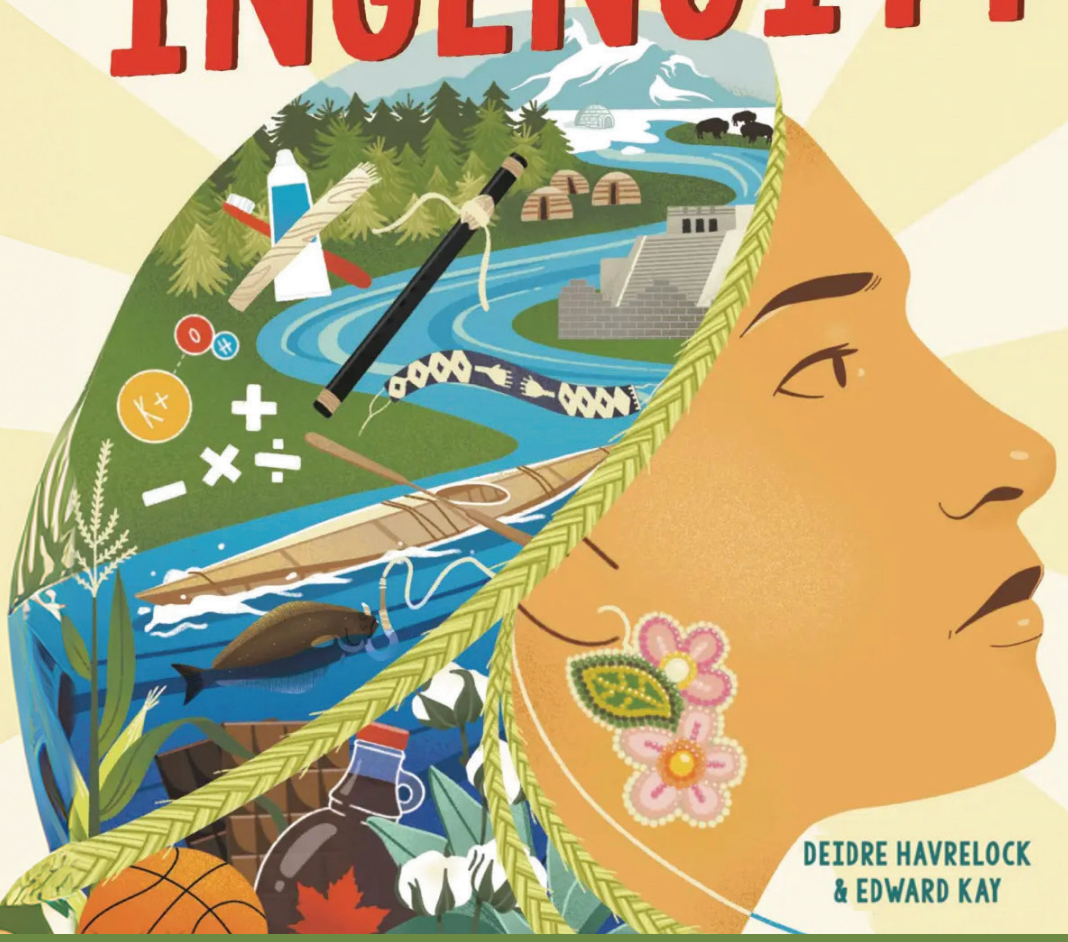

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"Animation can legit change lives. I know this because it changed mine."

Asiahn Bryant

Atlanta, GA

iamasiahn.com

BACKGROUND: You may already be familiar with Asiahn's voice—she plays Karma Grant in the CG-animated Netflix series *Karma's World*. And she also has one foot in the music industry as a three-time Grammy-nominated songwriter with a first studio album under her belt.

In the next chapter of her career, Asiahn wants to channel all this natural creative flair into developing her own animated kids content. "I have always loved cartoons and anime—as a child, it was my escape from a rough upbringing."

GOALS: At the moment, Asiahn is deeply focused on finishing and landing a few TV pitches she has been working on, and hopes to "change lives" through storytelling in the long run.

Although she already wears multiple hats as an actor and singer-songwriter, she's interested in expanding her skill set further—and her next goal is to dig into the technical side of animation.

INSPIRATIONS: Cree Summer, the veteran voice actor who has given life to characters from hit toons like *Rugrats* and *Codename: Kids Next Door*. "[She's] one of my favorite diverse voices in animation," Asiahn says. "I knew I could do this because she did it first."

She also has a lot of admiration for the legacy of companies like Disney and DreamWorks, and would love to work with them someday.

UNIQUE HOBBY: Archery. "[It's] very odd, but after *The Hunger Games*, I wanted to be Katniss Everdeen."

Lío Guevara

Los Angeles, CA

linkedin.com/in/lioguevara

BACKGROUND: A queer first-generation Cuban-American, Lío graduated from the University of Central Florida with a BFA in character animation. But their boundless creativity can be traced all the way back to a childhood spent doodling and daydreaming.

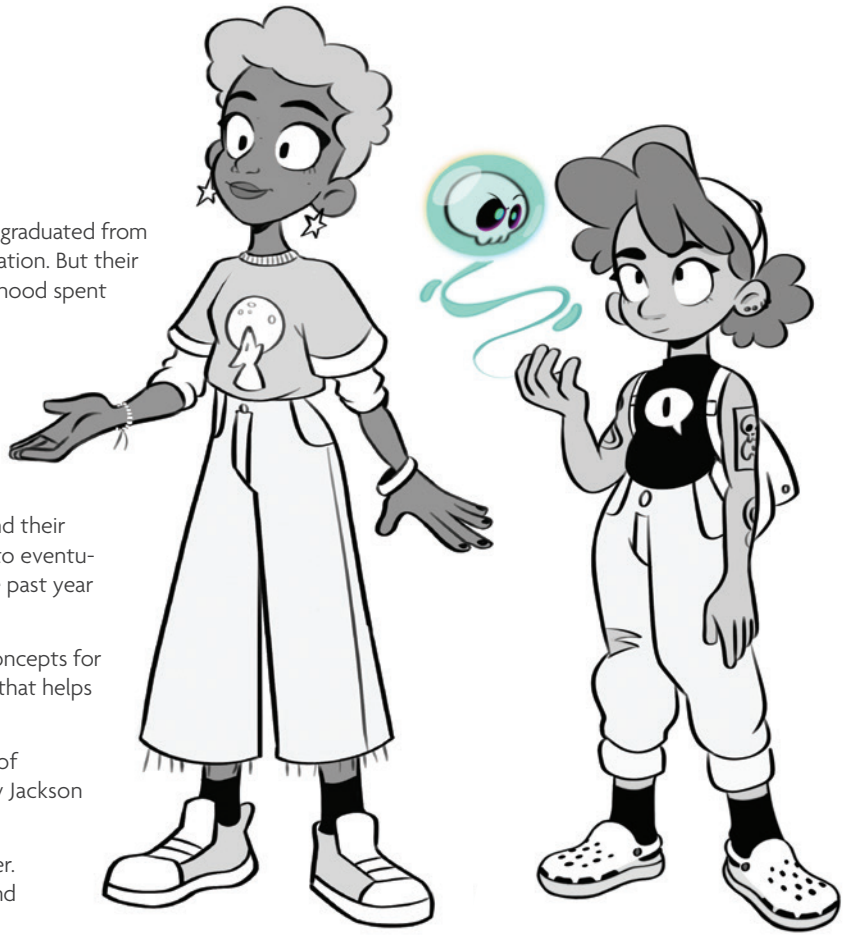
Lío impressed the team at Disney TV Animation so much during a summer internship in 2021 that they were brought back as a freelance character designer to work on *The Owl House* the following year. They also participated as a writing mentee in Netflix's Career Foundations Program.

GOALS: The next move for this Miami-raised artist is to expand their horizons by pivoting to screenwriting, laying the foundation to eventually pitch and develop a series. "I've spent the majority of the past year developing my voice as a writer by drafting original samples."

PREFERRED GENRES/THEMES: Spooky comedies and fantasy concepts for YA and co-viewing families. Lío also wants to create content that helps queer kids of color feel represented.

INSPIRATIONS: Rebecca Sugar, the multi-hyphenate creator of popular Cartoon Network series *Steven Universe*, and Percy Jackson author Rick Riordan.

UNIQUE HOBBY: Expert playlist-maker and Rubik's Cube master. "I was part of a very unofficial Rubik's Cube club in college, and always carry a cube on me to this day."



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Stephan Collins-Stepney

Los Angeles, CA

scstepney@gmail.com

BACKGROUND: A playwright/screenwriter with an MFA in writing for the stage and screen from Queens University of Charlotte (NC), Stephan is a socially awkward and introverted neuro-divergent Black creator who has figured out how to fit in by not fitting in. They mostly write comedy-driven, fish-out-of-water stories for TV featuring intersectional-identifying Black protagonists in extraordinary situations, while also touching on social justice and human compassion.

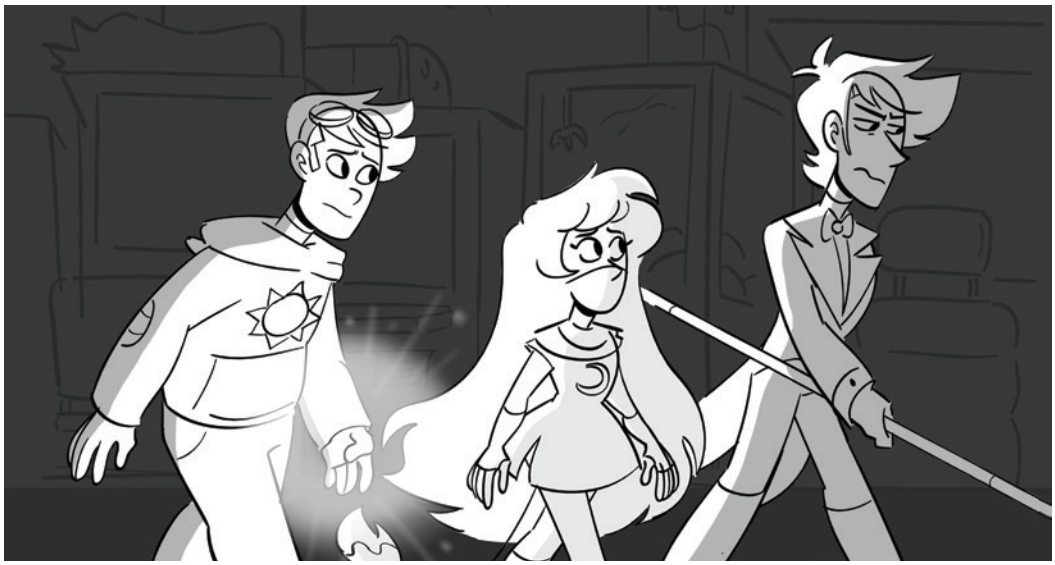
FAVORITE MEDIUM: 2D animation

INSPIRATIONS: "Fred Rogers inspired me in the way he talked to children. He wasn't big or flashy; he just talked to them like they were, you know...people! In terms of visual artists, an animator I admire is Layron DeJarnette, who works on *The Proud Family*."

COOL ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Participating in Kidscreen's Diverse Voices mentoring program, pitching their kids series pilot at Kidscreen Summit 2024 in San Diego, and being accepted into RespectAbility's Children's Content Lab in 2023.

GOALS: Short term, Stephan would love to write for an existing show, but they also aspire to become a showrunner. They're eyeing Nickelodeon for work because they admire how the network's shows take chances. And they're also impressed by APC Kids' mission as a boutique studio.

PASSIONS: Children's media, storytelling, racial equity, neurodiversity and social justice.



Alexis Jauregui

Irvine, CA

alexisjauregui.com

CURRENTLY: Production coordinator, Cartoon Network

BACKGROUND: Alexis is a Peruvian-Chinese illustrator and story artist who earned a BFA in animation from California State University (Fullerton) in 2019. After graduating, she worked as a production assistant at DreamWorks Animation Television on *Archibald's Next Big Thing*. And she's currently a production coordinator for Cartoon Cartoons (Cartoon Network's shorts program showcasing diverse stories), where she helps guide new creators through the development and production process.

PASSION: What makes a character human. "There's something so magical about making an audience care about a drawing on TV, and it's not just about the drawing itself—it's about the voices, themes and lessons they learn along the way."

GOALS: To become a storyboard artist and work at Titmouse, Disney, Netflix or Nickelodeon.

INSPIRATIONS: Hayao Miyazaki, Rebecca Sugar, Matt Braly, Dana Terrace and the entire artistic team behind *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse*.

COOL ACCOMPLISHMENT: Alexis designed and illustrated book covers and spot art for the middle-grade book series *Gamer Girls* (Andrews McMeel Publishing).

FAVORITE MEDIUM: 2D animation

UNIQUE HOBBY: Trying every boba tea spot in California. "I have an entire spreadsheet with ratings and my thoughts on each spot," she says. "It also helps me explore new cities and cultures along the way."

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Sandra Mazuera

Los Angeles, CA

linkedin.com/in/sandra-mazuera-86081230

CURRENTLY: Production department secretary on *Hamster & Gretel*, Disney TV Animation

BACKGROUND: Sandra is a Colombian-American storyteller who's passionate about writing impactful stories dealing with bicultural families and the immigrant's journey. She recently graduated from DePaul University with an MFA in animation, and is also a trained voice actor through Second City and Acting Studio Chicago, specializing in narrations for video games, animation and commercials in English and Spanish.

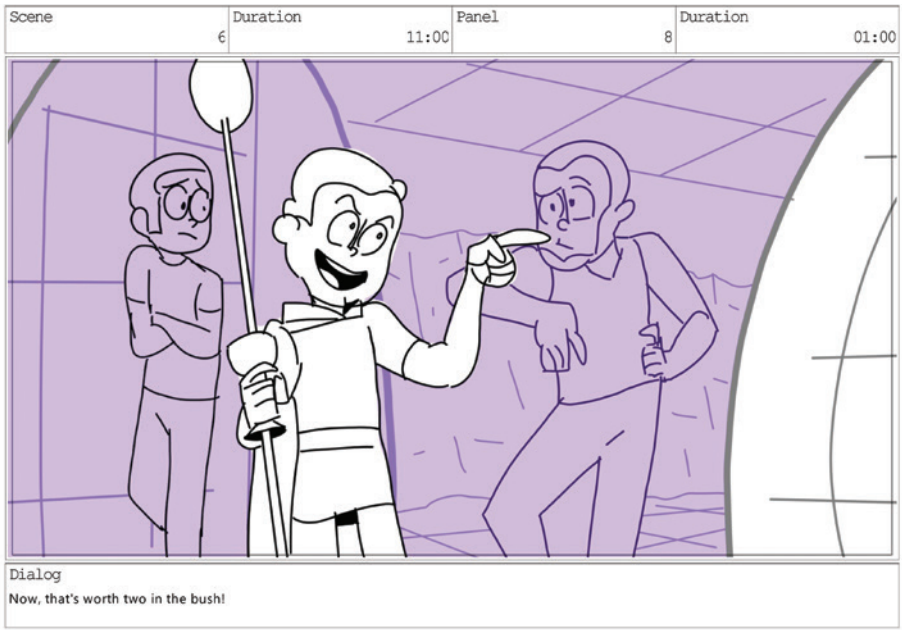
INDUSTRY EXPERIENCE: In 2022, she interned with Nickelodeon Animation's talent and casting team, where she coordinated recording sessions, saw voice directors work through a script with talent, and provided feedback during readings.

NEW SKILL: Over the past year, she has focused on developing screenwriting skills to enhance her ability to tell and animate engrossing stories.

INSPIRATIONS: Sandra grew up in the '90s during Disney Feature Animation's golden age of theatrical films, and this drew her to the impactful visual storytelling of the kids entertainment industry. In particular, she adores Glen Keane's timeless character animation, and he continues to inspire her work with the fun, flawed and larger-than-life personalities he creates.

GOALS: Sandra wants to work her way up into an executive producer role, where she hopes to use her talents to create great new shows for kids. To help develop her skill set for the future, she is looking for opportunities to learn more about animation production, writing and voice directing.

"I can make nearly anything I can imagine."



Russell Ramey

Huntington Beach, CA

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BACKGROUND: A California native, Russell holds a BFA in animation from California State University (Fullerton). He has been developing a passion and skill set for cartoons his whole life, channelling both into his very own web comic, *Cupbearers*, which has generated more than 204,000 views on the Tapas app.

With a proven ability to craft a compelling original IP, Russell is looking to break into the industry and develop more content that gives kids reasons to laugh out loud and dream big. "I do this because I can't *not* do this," he emphasizes.

INSPIRATIONS: Nick series *Avatar: The Last Airbender* ranks as Russell's all-time favorite work of art, which is no surprise, given his passion for visual storytelling. He's also a Dungeons & Dragons superfan and credits Disney Television Animation with influencing his work through series ranging from *The Owl House* to *Amphibia*.

SKILLS: Serving as both writer and story artist for his web comic, Russell already has experience with juggling multiple roles to deliver stories. With more than 800 pages of work under his belt, he's especially well-versed in 2D animation. "Because I've been developing my skills with it for more than 20 years, I've reached a place where I can make nearly anything I can imagine."

And like any great artist, Russell is also constantly sharpening his existing skills and picking up new ones. Last year, for instance, he learned how to build environment and prop assets in Blender and use its Grease Pencil function to create animatics.

GOAL: To become an episodic director.

Lavender Sandi

Los Angeles, CA

lavendersandi.wixsite.com/website

BACKGROUND: Lavender is a West African artist with a BFA in animation, interactive technology, video graphics and special effects from New York's School of Visual Arts. She began drawing as soon as she was able to hold a pencil, and has always dreamed of making her own animated TV shows, books and merchandise.

In 2017, she created *Odd Todd*, an animated web series about a 10-year-old boy's coming-of-age adventures with his friends. "I design all the characters myself, write scripts and hire talent for voices, backgrounds, music and more," says Lavender. "I created *Odd Todd* out of love and passion, and I always put my soul into every aspect of it."

PASSIONS: Storytelling and cartoons.

SKILLS: 2D animation, character animation, reformer-based rig animation and character design.

Jon-Erik Johnson

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BACKGROUND: Jon-Erik has a BFA in illustration from the Academy of Art University in San Francisco, but his career path into animation was not a straightforward one. After working full time at Whole Foods Markets for about 18 years, he decided to pursue his love of drawing. "I'm passionate about art and creativity. I want to get into a career field that I can be proud of and show that inner child of mine, 'Hey, we made it!'"

WHAT DREW YOU TO THE INDUSTRY?: Jon-Erik is a big kid at heart—his hobby is building LEGO sets. (Right now, he's assembling Luke Skywalker's Landspeeder.) His long-time love of animation motivated him to explore a more creative future. "It's just one of those things where no matter how old you get, you never forget how those cartoons and animated films made you feel as a kid: the joy, laughter and intrigue of it all."

FAVORITE TOOLS: Digital illustration software Procreate and Adobe Illustrator.

GOALS: To build up a portfolio and start a career in the entertainment/animation industry.

Ultimately, he'd love to work with Cartoon Network, Nickelodeon or Disney. "These three companies have created some of the best animated programming in history. I'm so enthralled with their creative process and the longevity of their IPs."

Danielle Monique Brown

Los Angeles, CA

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BACKGROUND: Originally from South Texas, Danielle is a screenwriter who enjoys creating projects with Southern Gothic themes, magical realism and surreal humor. She graduated from Mount Holyoke College in 2018 with a BA in English and African studies.

Danielle was drawn to the kids entertainment industry because of her nostalgia for 2D-animated cartoons and deep love of storytelling.

INDUSTRY EXPERIENCE: She founded *Stellium* (a literary magazine for Black queer writers) and worked in the writers room on an indie animation project. She benefited from mentorships provided by Women in Animation, Black N' Animated and Rise Up Animation, as well as participating in Netflix's 2023 Animation Foundations Program.

INSPIRATION: Toni Morrison is one of Danielle's greatest inspirations. She admires how skillfully the American novelist weaves humor through even the toughest moments in her books.

PASSIONS: Community and liberation. Danielle also loves seeing people being free to create original art and openly be themselves.

GOALS: Long term, she would like to develop her original series and serve as a head writer or showrunner. In the meantime, she is honing her character and background design skills and looking to work as a staff writer on an animation series.

UNIQUE HOBBY: Danielle loves to bake bread and write terrible poetry.

Myles Hunt

Brooklyn, NY

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CURRENTLY: Founder & CEO, sMyles Creative

BACKGROUND: Myles is a writer and puppeteer who is hard of hearing. With a BA in arts and education from Hobart and William Smith Colleges, he has worked as a puppeteer at Disney and interned at The Jim Henson Company. He's currently developing an animated series for five- to 12-year-olds called *Tune City* that revolves around the musical adventures of a deaf drummer and his bandmates, as well as collaborating on an animated detective series concept for preschoolers featuring a deaf cat.

GOALS: To work with the Muppets—the characters who taught him how to lip-read. "I would love to work for Sesame Workshop, Henson or Wētā Workshop because all of their stories and creations remain the best in my eyes," he says.

INDUSTRY ACHIEVEMENT: In 2022, Myles was selected to participate in RespectAbility's first-ever Children's Content Lab for disabled TV creators.

INSPIRATIONS: *Sesame Street*, Jim Henson and The Muppets especially.

WHAT PEOPLE SHOULD KNOW: "I am a creative who proudly wears hearing aids in both ears and am a master of lip-reading. I love working with others, and relish the chance to collaborate and/or assist other creatives in the space."

"All kids should see themselves."

Jordan Hackman

Culver City, CA

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BACKGROUND: Jordan is an up-and-coming screenwriter and producer driven by a love of community, storytelling and amplifying diverse voices and artists in animation. Her industry experience already includes a development internship at HarperCollins Publishers, where she read children's books under consideration for screen adaptations, and a gig in artist management at Sony Pictures Animation.

WHY THE KIDS INDUSTRY?: "Growing up, there was a lack of characters in animated shows that I related to. They were either sassy or sporty, which I didn't identify with," she explains. "Knowing that the scene has now changed, I would love to be a part of the movement to create more Black and Brown characters in kids animation because all kids should see themselves on screen."

FAVORITE SKILL: "Screenwriting, because you have the power to create worlds and characters," she says.

GOALS: To create more compelling stories, gain professional experience in production, and apply to become a production and screenwriting professional. Longer term, she wants to be a showrunner, a producer and a mentor for Black and LatinX writers.

INSPIRATIONS: American writer, producer, actor and comedian Quinta Brunson (*Abbott Elementary*). "I love how she has gone from humble beginnings at Buzzfeed to winning an Emmy for her first show. She inspires me because she was able to bring her story to the screen, despite starting from an untraditional place."

UNIQUE HOBBY: Crocheting. "It's such a joy learning how to create clothing and animals from yarn."

Brenda Lane

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BACKGROUND: Illustrator Brenda Lane has a BFA in communication arts from Virginia Commonwealth University. She has since been developing her own projects while working as a production assistant at career development org Black N' Animated.

GOALS: To "craft immersive worlds and compelling characters that spark imagination in young audiences." To that end, she's aiming to start off by building her presence in the industry and working on a variety of animated films and TV series.

INSPIRATIONS: Brenda is a big fan of visual development artist Celine Kim (*The Sea Beast*).

FAVORITE MEDIUM: 2D animation and "creating detailed landscapes, drawing characters and expressing ideas through painting and drawing." Brenda's all about creating compelling stories and experimenting with color and light in her art.

PASSIONS: Honing her illustration skills, telling diverse stories accurately, having fun and bringing creative solutions to the projects she supports. For her *Unicorn* concept (pictured above), Brenda created the character designs, background paintings and logo.

Rodrigo Quiroga

Los Angeles, CA

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BACKGROUND: Rodrigo Quiroga has an associate degree in art from East Los Angeles College and a BA in animation from California State University (Long Beach). Inspired by Disney films he watched on VHS as a kid (especially *Aladdin* and *The Lion King*), Rodrigo has aspired to become an animator for a long time. "I wanted a job where I could unapologetically be as creative and fun as possible."

FAVORITE MEDIUM: 2D animation, because he believes it brings the viewer "closer to the artists' hands." His favorite creatives include comic artists Sean Phillips and Daniel Warren Johnson.

INDUSTRY EXPERIENCE: Rodrigo used to work as a teacher's assistant at an elementary school. "Working with children was great because it was like being a kid again," he says. "Learning and creating along with them gave me a fresh perspective and invigorated my own imagination and creativity." He's especially passionate about teaching art to encourage creativity in future generations.

GOALS: He's looking to secure work on animated projects in the short term, and chart a career path into storyboarding and directing.

NEW SKILL: "I have been developing my storyboard skills over the past year by sketching, doing thumbnail film studies and creating comics and characters of my own."

DREAM COMPANY TO WORK FOR: Nickelodeon Animation Studios. "They have consistently kept to their motto of 'Kids First,' and one can see that in their unique, bombastic and iconic animated content."

Tavashia Berry

Los Angeles, CA

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BACKGROUND: Tavashia, who goes by Tavvy, is a screenwriter with a Master's degree in library and information science from the University of South Carolina. As a freelancer, they wrote the episode "Runway Recycling" for PBS KIDS series *Work It Out Wombats!*, which premiered last year. And they also participated in the Netflix Animation Foundations Program.

Tavvy was drawn to the kids entertainment industry by the idea of making content for the often-overlooked teen demo. "Some shows seem to hold onto the idea of 'how teens should act' and 'what teenagers are believed to like,' as opposed to actually developing something that could make them feel seen."

DREAM COMPANIES TO WORK FOR: "I would love to work for Square Enix on a giant, multi-character RPG," says Tavvy. And Cartoon Network brings back fond memories of watching TV with friends and family.

GOALS: Land some freelance writing work, or a development or staff writer job. "I have a lot of mentorships under my belt and a writing credit, so I'm ready to find opportunities to make myself an indispensable part of a writing team."

In the long term, Tavvy is also writing an epic fantasy adventure concept that has been in the works since middle school. "It's something I don't want to rush, so I will be patient with each piece I develop until I am ready to pitch."

UNIQUE HOBBY: Collecting enamel pins. "I go to a lot of anime and artist conventions, and pins are one of the main things I pick up."

Vivian González

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BACKGROUND: Originally from New Jersey, Vivian is an up-and-coming graphic designer, illustrator and storyboard artist with a BFA in graphic design from Montclair University. She was recommended for Kidscreen's Diverse Voices program by LatinX in Animation, a nonprofit org dedicated to uniting LatinX groups within the animation, VFX and gaming industries.

INDUSTRY EXPERIENCE: Vivian got her start in the kids entertainment industry in 2016 as a creative services intern at Disney, where she helped develop art designs and assisted with graphics needs. Three years later, she interned with The Disney College Program, working with a team to create an immersive guest experience and use marketing strategies to sell merchandise.

She's currently working as a freelance production assistant at Walt Disney Television, collaborating with the senior production manager and creative services department on graphic project essentials and digital design artwork.

Nazul Sobrino

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BACKGROUND: Nazul already has an impressive repertoire of storyboard artist and revisionist skills that she developed while working on adult-skewing projects at studios such as Stoopid Buddy, Titmouse and Lionsgate after earning a BFA in animation/art and film from California State University (Fullerton).

But she always knew that entertainment for younger viewers was her true calling, and she found her professional groove as a storyboard revisionist on Nickelodeon's *Monster High* series in May 2021—a gig that ended earlier this year.

GOALS: Nazul is looking to level up and become a full-time board artist. To meet the demands of this job, she has been diligently practicing storyboarding with speed, in addition to becoming more familiar with multiple styles, including CG, 2D and stop motion.

While she would love to be back at Nick, where she got along well with her production team, DreamWorks Animation Television is also on Nazul's list of dream companies to work for. She's interested in CG animation and action-comedies, especially ones targeting older kids.

PROUDEST MOMENT: Working on episodes of *Monster High* that dealt with autistic and LGBTQ+ representation aligned with Nazul's creative goals and her identity as a neurodivergent, queer and trans Latina. "Emotional growth and adversity, found family and culture, giving representation not only to marginalized groups, but also to mental health—these are stories I really want to tell with my art."

UNIQUE HOBBY: She's a jazz pianist who writes her own music. And if you're looking for recipes, Nazul has also mastered the art of making flavorful pickles.

"I want to be a part of helping kids feel seen."

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